

## **In Pursuit of Democratic Practice: Self-Study as a Democratic Approach to Teaching Social Studies**

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*Dewey (1916/2009) viewed democracy as a “path or journey”. This suggests that there is no mutually agreed upon end. Similarly, in teaching and teacher education, if viewed as a learning problem, the end is the process according to Ritter (2010) “[t]eaching others how to teach for democratic citizenship represents a process that righteously lacks a conclusion” (p. 90). Without a definitive conclusion there are many potentially valuable conceptions and enactments of democratic living and learning. Discussing these strong connections between democracy in social studies and self-study, Powell (2010) argues “when social studies teachers engage in ‘reflectively pragmatic’ study of their own practice, they. . . position themselves to see the possibilities inherent in the social and political nature of their work” (p. 26). This is indicative of a desire to pursue a teaching practice that does not contradict one’s effort to explicitly teach democratic citizenship. Given the unique contexts and many potentially valuable conceptions of democratic citizenship, inquiry into one’s practice toward a democratic approach and improving ones teaching practice is necessary. What follows is an argument for the promise of self-study to empower teachers toward democratic ends through researching their own practice. This is accomplished here through a review of relevant literature and a description of the framework, methods, and a major finding of a collaborative self-study research project conducted during the spring of 2009.*

Dewey (1916/2009) viewed democracy as “associated living and conjoined communicated experience” (p. 84), considering it more of a path than an end. His view suggests that there is no mutually agreed upon end. Similarly, when teaching and/or teacher education is viewed as a learning problem, the end is the process, according to Ritter (2010) “[t]eaching others how to teach for democratic citizenship represents a process that righteously lacks a conclusion” (p. 90). Without a definitive conclusion there are many potentially valuable conceptions and enactments of democratic living and learning. This ambiguity poses a unique challenge, and part of the problem presented to democratically minded teachers and teacher educators. To limit what is democratic by imposing a definition is undemocratic. The absence of definition leaves room for a nihilistic perspective on the goals and purposes of teaching. Such a void may allow values that are not democratic to masquerade as such.

Given its ability to generate locally, situated, and provisional knowledge of teaching (LaBoskey, 2004b, p. 1170) self-study can be a powerful resource for teacher educators and classroom teachers who are interested in using critical approaches to systematic reflection. Teachers employing self-study may develop a better understanding of the critical, communal, and personal perspectives of democracy in their practice.

Discussing these strong connections between democracy in social studies instruction and self-study, Powell (2010) argues, “when social studies teachers engage in ‘reflectively pragmatic’ study of their own practice, they...position themselves to see the possibilities inherent in the social and political nature of their work” (p. 26). This is indicative of a desire to pursue a teaching practice that does not contradict one’s effort to explicitly teach democratic citizenship. Given the unique contexts and many potentially valuable conceptions of democratic citizenship, inquiry into one’s practice toward a democratic approach and improving ones teaching practice is necessary. What follows is a review of literature on the relationship between social studies education and self-study inquiry and the role of democratic theory in teaching social studies for citizenship purposes. This review, presented with a discussion of self-study methodology and my own experience as an example support an argument for the potential of self-study to empower teachers toward democratic ends through inquiry into their own practice.

### **Social Studies Education and Self-Study**

Self-study as it connects to social studies education and democratic practice is strongly anchored in literature on democratic education and reflective practice (see Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983). Self-study that is grounded in critically reflective inquiry can help teachers and teacher educators connect their learning with their practice. As I engaged in my own self-study research I focused on bridging my graduate studies, which centered largely on democratic education, with my actual teaching of social studies to high school students. In reexamining the data for this article I explored how self-study indeed helped me move toward a more democratic practice, and how it worked to reshape my image of self as a teacher. Claims that self-study inquiry holds the potential to empower teachers through the exploration of their beliefs and the development of a rationale for teaching social studies (Hawley, 2010b) emerged in my own practice.

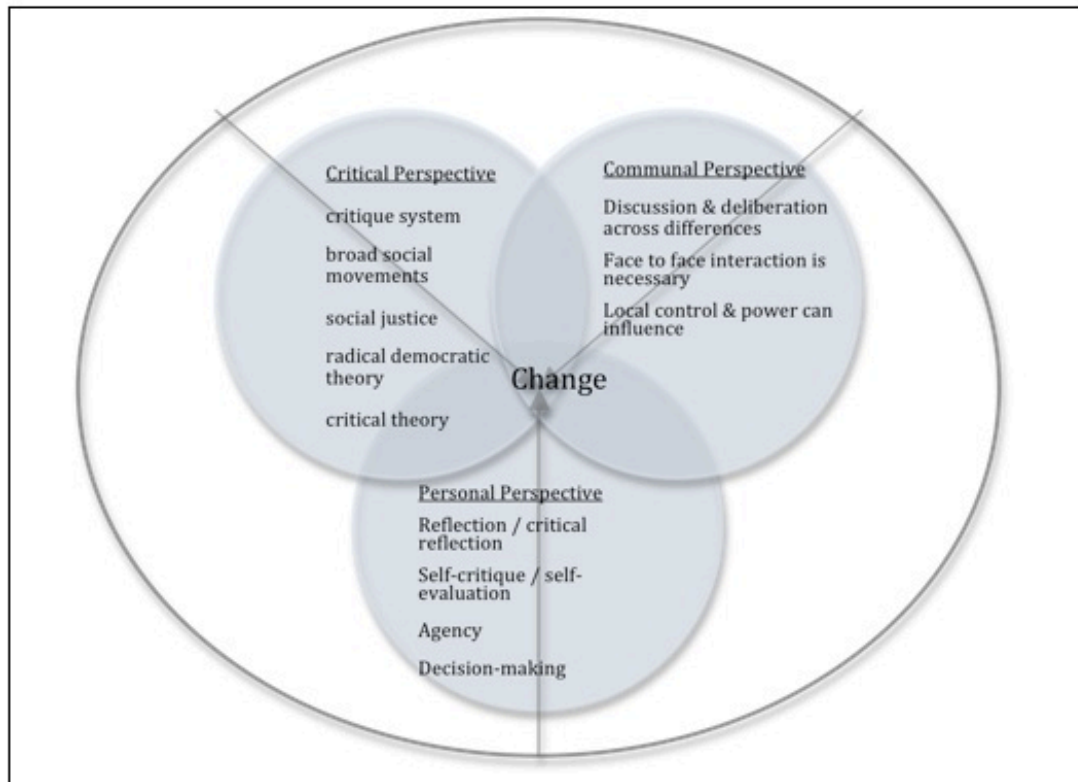
## **Social Studies Purposes and Self-Study as Reflective Practice**

Barton and Levstick (2004) suggest the purpose of social studies education is "...to prepare students for citizenship in a democracy" (p. 28). According to the National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], social studies is designed "...to help students develop the knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to become effective citizens" (NCSS, 2001). Thus, part of addressing these stated goals, social studies educators should consider the most democratically oriented approaches to teaching as a way to support their efforts to teach for citizenship education. My beliefs about enacting a democratically reflective practice place high value on student voice in the classroom, with consideration for social justice issues, and social and deliberative action. Each of these aspects of teaching and learning is aimed at improving practice, often through emancipation of thought and action, or through exercising sound decision-making skills and democratic dispositions for the improvement of society.

## **Democratic Education through Self-Study Inquiry**

Hunt & Metcalf (1968) identified the need for a clear purpose in social studies education. Dewey's (1916/2009) communal notion of democracy as a mode of "associated living" in a "conjoined experience" is a widely accepted starting point for this discussion, though it has hardly led to a cohesive or coherent purpose in social studies education. Social studies education, as a field, tends to place value on plurality and a variety of purposes related to the citizenship knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary in a democratic society. Three perspectives of democracy that seem to prevail throughout the literature are the critical, the communal, and the personal. When all three of these perspectives are goals for teaching social studies and are present in daily teaching and learning, they can result in social change as well as the learning the skills, dispositions, and knowledge necessary to work toward deepening democracy. This framework, shown in Figure 1, helps to explain the result of my own experiences as a graduate student learning about democracy in social studies education. In addition, the framework enabled me to explore my own work and improve as a democratically minded teacher and teacher educator.

Figure 1.



Perspectives on Democratic Living

From Hostetler (2012)

As a society we tend to continuously aspire toward widespread acceptance of Dewey's communal conception of democratic living, while as teachers, the communities in which we live and work seem to accept them as always being on duty. How we teach becomes very much a part of who we are. As Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) suggest, "that to study a practice is simultaneously to study self: a study of self-in-relation to other (p.14)." Social studies educators ought to be individual theorists working communally to put personal and public theories about social education into practice through critical reflection. Kincheloe (2003) agrees that "democratic educational research performed by teachers renders teaching practice more theoretical in that it is supported by reflection and grounded in cultural and socio-historical context (p. 41)." The notion of a democratic approach to practice while researching one's practice is a stance from which social studies educators can begin to view and interact with the

world, the school, and their colleagues and students leading to professional empowerment and educational change.

### **The Democratic “Problem”**

The “problem” of being democratic in social studies education is that it is inherently “undemocratic” to force a definition of democracy on others. Giving definitions of democracy assumes either uncritical acceptance of the definition, or invites critique and skepticism from those who receive it. Failing to argue for a particular notion of democracy is equally problematic, presenting a difficult paradox to negotiate. By first developing a framework for understanding democratic practice that takes into consideration a variety of perspectives and theories, a flexible and more inclusive notion of democratic practice can be used to understand specific aspects of democratic teaching and learning. In this article, the focus is on aspects of this framework that includes emancipation/agency, reflection, decision-making, discussion, critique of a system, and community.

Communal, critical, and personal perspectives act as categories for more specific characteristics so as not to impose any one perspective or judgment about whether or not some action or experience is more or less democratic, while at the same time providing clear boundaries for what might be considered democratic. In addition, as Kincheloe (2003) argues, the source of theory and knowledge cannot rely solely on academic experts but should also reside with teachers who are in schools everyday and involved in intensely personal relationships with students. He suggests that teacher directed research is a part of the democratization of schools as a workplace and necessary to the professionalization of teachers. Research like this helps to fill theoretical gaps between perspectives in the literature and conceptions of democracy in practice allowing teachers to add to this conceptual framework through practitioner inquiry. The conceptual framework addresses these problems of democracy as it includes the critical, communal, and personal perspectives as they relate to one another and to teaching practice.

### ***The Critical Perspective***

The critical perspective includes the work of scholars like Brosio (1994) and Kincheloe (2001; 2003). Brosio and Kincheloe, whose work is informed by critical theory and radical theories of democracy, critique the system while making an argument for teachers in the field of

social studies to teach democratically. This work suggests moving beyond teaching facts and considers how we are questioning the system as well as asking questions within the system. In working from this critical perspective teachers along with their students, would consider critical questions about the people, systems and institutions of society that so often oppress and take advantage of underprivileged groups and individuals. Brosio (1994) argues that teachers should approach their practice in ways that work against the dominant culture no matter what it is. The dominant culture, suggested by Brosio, is learned regardless of it being taught in schools, and teachers who are interested in working toward a transformative democratic practice and deeper democratic society should therefore work to challenge students' taken-for-granted ideas about the world.

Kincheloe (2003) argues that critical social science calls for teachers to take matters into their own hands and promote self-reflection that results in attitudinal change. He notes "if the schools are to become democratic and offer challenges to anti-democratic tendencies of the era, they must pursue the concept of good work for teachers and individuals in society as a whole." (Kincheloe, 2003, p. 25). In Kincheloe's view this means teachers must take on the role of researching their own practice within their unique contexts and work against the elitism that reinforces authoritarian and hierarchical structures that disempower teachers and ultimately their students.

### ***The Communal Perspective***

The second perspective is one that works with students to build community as a way of deepening democracy. Green's (1999) work includes a communal focus informed by Dewey's (1927/1988) argument for a face-to-face community as a central consideration for deepening democracy. Human interaction, discussion, deliberation, and working together across differences (Hess, 2009; Parker, 2003) are essential aspects of the communal perspective. This perspective holds that for society to transform, to deepen democracy, teachers must offer students opportunities to engage in discussions and learn the skills and dispositions necessary to deliberate with others on relevant public problems and issues. Parker (2003) suggests that creating spaces for citizens of a diverse community to meet and deliberate on problems for the purpose of developing solutions is essential to working toward a better society.

## ***The Personal Perspective***

In this perspective the primary focus is on reflective thinking and inquiry as related to being democratic (Powell, 2010). It centers on how individuals see themselves as actors in history or agents of change in society (den Heyer, 2003), as well as matters of individual voice, image, and participation or action through decision-making. This perspective is important to include because while critical ways of viewing society and communal activity can lead to the common theme, and underlying assumption of social change through deepening democracy, it is necessary for individuals to think and act in ways that support this effort. Individuals in society must see themselves as agents of change and participants in history to support social change. They must feel empowered.

Prior to reviewing the literature on this topic, I assumed that a connection between democratic practice and reflective thinking existed in that one necessitates the other. My assumptions were confirmed as democratic practice literature identifies reflection as a necessary aspect (Dewey, 1916/2009; Gutmann, 1987) and reflective practice literature espouses a democratic orientation as essential (Braun & Crumpler, 2004; Dinkleman, 1999, 2000, 2003; Dyke, 2006; Griffin, 1942/1992; Hulfish & Smith, 1961; Hunt & Metcalf, 1968; Manfra, 2009; Powell, 2010; Schön, 1983; Shaver, 1965; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Reflective practice is a social activity, which works to confront assumptions and beliefs, and question power and hegemony. In doing so a reflective practice then shares some common characteristics with common democratic ideas and values (Hulfish & Smith, 1961; Hunt & Metcalf, 1968; Zeichner & Liston, 1996). The democratic perspectives of critical, personal, and communal are necessary to reflective inquiry in and on practice.

## **Self-Study**

Self-study is self-initiated and focused, improvement aimed, interactive at one or more points during the process, conducted through diverse methodologies of qualitative research, and validated through a process based on trustworthiness (LaBoskey, 2004b). Russell (2004) adds that making the research public has its benefits in that the move from private to public leads to additional layers of understanding through thinking about and articulating the process and findings of the researcher's experience (see Hostetler, 2010). These aspects of self-study make it an example of the kind of teacher research that positions the creation of knowledge about

practice with the teacher, making it democratic in nature (Kincheloe, 2003).

Self-study has been recognized as a method of reflective inquiry suited to practitioners (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) seeking to improve their practice. Self-study is, by its very nature, democratic and encouraging of critical reflection; but reflection does not, by default, constitute self-study (LaBoskey, 2004a). In educational settings it could be accepted that the teacher may not have all of the answers and may not ask all of the questions that lead to the creation of knowledge. In this sense self-study comes from a post-modern perspective (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998) and is aligned with key theoretical points of an inquiry stance (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; 2009). LaBoskey (2004a) outlined key theoretical aspects of self-study as being post-modern, feminist, and post-structural. From this perspective, knowledge is contextually and culturally sensitive, with learning grounded in social constructivist learning theory and with a consideration of social justice (Tyson & Park, 2008),

My research was interpretivist in nature and used self-study methodology for inquiry into my own practice. I relied on qualitative methods of data collection and the constant comparative method of analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). What I found was that my learning during graduate studies influenced my practice in many ways, but through self-study as a catalyst I experienced a sense of empowerment as a professional that led to curricular change in the school district's social studies program.

## **Research Question**

As a first year doctoral student I became interested in my own professional development and the influence of learning about democracy in social studies as a part of my graduate studies on my teaching practice. I believe theory, in many forms, can serve as a foundation to support and facilitate decision-making and action in practice. Several authors have argued for the potential of self-study to bridge theory and practice through the alignment of beliefs, intent, and practice (Loughran & Northfield, 1998; LaBoskey, 2004a; Russell, 2004). Out of this desire to observe the influence of my learning on my own teaching practice, the following research question emerged: How *do* graduate studies influence my teaching practice pedagogically and professionally? (see Hostetler, 2010). Self-study methodology was selected as a way to better understand my experiences as a teacher attempting to enact my purposes for teaching social studies.



## **Context**

This study took place from December 2008 through May 2009. I engaged in this study as both a student in graduate school and a full-time social studies teacher. Currently, I am in my fourth year as a doctoral candidate in Curriculum and Instruction in Social Studies at a large mid-western university in a doctoral. This research took place in two contexts. First, at the school in which I taught. And second, in the collaborative group where I met with colleagues who were also developing their own questions and self-study research processes.

### ***The School***

I was employed for seven years as a full-time social studies teacher at a middle class rural/suburban public high school in Ohio. The high school had a student population between 900 and 1,000 students with few minority students, a graduation rate of 96.3% and an attendance rate of 95.6%. The building and the district administration, faculty, and staff pride themselves on having achieved a state rating of “excellent” and “excellent with distinction” in recent years.

### ***The Collaborative Research Group***

The collaborative group engaging in this self-study consisted of six members: two teacher education professors and four graduate students. One of the graduate students was at the master’s level and three were at the doctoral level. Two of the graduate students were teaching secondary social studies full time during the study and two had taken leave to be at the university full-time. All six members of the group were social studies teachers or teacher educators. This group met once a month from December 2008 through May 2009 and rotated meetings between the homes of group members. Each group member took the opportunity to provide food and a place to have discussion after lunch on a Sunday afternoon. This proved to be important to the group as we developed a relationship as colleagues that allowed us to speak freely and challenge each other’s ideas.

## **Data Collection**

Data for this study was collected from December 2008 through May 2009. I relied on a personal research journal, email exchanges, posts to our collaborative self-study blog, and notes

and transcripts from monthly self-study collaborative group meetings. Journal writing occurred after I taught and after a graduate class meeting. The journal entries were treated as if they were field notes in naturalistic inquiry. They consisted of details of my practice in context and my own thinking about what was happening. The journal entries, like field notes, helped to capture the on-goings of research and record moments of inquiry in the field, in as much detail as possible (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Journal entries were essential for considering what was observed in the moment of, or immediately after an experience as I reflected on reasons for practical decisions. I made journal entries five to six days a week, one to three times a day after teaching or learning experiences. They contained details about decisions made, experiences had, and thoughts or impressions of outcomes. I posted to our collaborative group's blog once or twice a month, with seven total, and meant the posts to be an opportunity to bring together thoughts from journaling and conversations from collaborative group meetings with practical experiences in the classroom. In doing so I discussed themes, impressions, conclusions, and receive feedback and questions from my critical friends to push my thinking about my experience and improvement in practice.

## **Data Analysis**

The constant comparative method of analysis was used to draw conclusions from this self-study. Each data source was read, re-read, and coded for themes and outcomes. First, open coding was done to establish initial codes. Second, data were re-read and synonymous codes were combined into categories. Using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) these categories were compared to data and samples of data were pulled to fill categories and create themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As data sources were read, re-read, and analyzed for frequency and significance of themes, data were organized and themes became findings. The following is a result of exploring a key finding from the book chapter I was invited to write for Alicia R. Crowe, Ph.D. (see Crowe, 2010). After co-presenting and various informal conversations at the Castle VIII conference, I felt this finding was particularly relevant for practitioners who might consider what it means to act democratically in a professional setting.

## **Democratic Empowerment through Self-Study**

During the latest Self-Study Conference, Castle VIII, I had the pleasure of presenting and informally discussing my self-study work with scholars, advisors, and mentors. As I listened to presentations and engaged in these conversations I began to think about how my own interests in social studies teachers' beliefs about democracy might influence their practice. Within my own self-study it led me to think about how self-study might serve as a democratically oriented approach to a critical inquiry of my own practice. This thinking led to the recognition of how a changing image of myself as a teacher with increasing efficacy (Hostetler, 2010) might have empowered me to act. Furthermore, how it might have encouraged me to act based on a thoughtful rationale about democratic reflection as a foundation for practice, as opposed to systemic pressures or perceived expectations of administrators or colleagues. What follows is discussion of key finding, teacher empowerment through self-study, as part of the influence of learning in graduate studies on my own teaching practice.

## **Teacher Empowerment Through Self-Study**

### ***Teacher Research as Democratic***

One way the self-study process was itself democratic was that it was formed and altered out of thinking about and for democratic purposes aimed at self-improvement. An inquiry approach to practice provided by self-study gave me a way to explore and understand my own rationale for teaching social studies in democratic ways and for democratic purposes. What I think of as democratic is working toward an understanding of a democratic social, political, and economic society as well as, the development of the skills and dispositions necessary for living in a democratic society. Examples of the democratic values and practices I shared with my students were listening across difference, learning through interaction and discussion with others, and deliberation with others. This reflects my own communal perspective on democratic practice.

“Students listened as I explained my ‘philosophy’” about teaching (Hostetler, Journal Entry, January 29, 2009). I shared my own beliefs and rationale for why I was teaching and how I saw myself differently as a teacher. I would do so at length on two more occasions during that semester. I had never thought to share my rationale for teaching as a part of course discussion. However, through journaling and collaborative meetings I came to believe that sharing and

discussing my rationale for teaching helped students to better understand how and why I was doing things in particular ways and helped me to better understand how I was aligning purpose, instruction, and assessment to meet the needs of students.

In a fall 2009 semester course called *Educating the Good Citizen* there was quite a bit of talk of what constitutes ‘good’ teaching, conceptions of citizenship education, and developing rationales for teaching social studies. Consequently throughout much of my journal there is writing about my beliefs about teaching and my own rationale for teaching social studies. Through self-study I worked to understand my own beliefs about teaching as influenced by learning I experienced during my graduate studies and in which was emerging in my teaching practice.

In addition to the course, the collaborative research group was instrumental in reframing my own thinking about the research. Through discussion and questioning the collaborative group pushed to frame and reframe ideas and experiences in ways that led to changes in my own image of what I was as a teacher. One of the most important instances of reframing occurred with my proclaimed desire to be a more ‘effective’ teacher was supportively questioned.

You mentioned that you are interested in looking at how your graduate work affects your teaching practice and thinking as a teacher. You then mention that you want to see how this influences your “effectiveness” in both situations. Can you say more about what you mean by effectiveness. There are plenty of ways you can approach this and I was wondering if you had thought about what you mean or if you are going to just pay attention to it as you go along? (T. Hawley, Blog Post, January 31, 2009).

This questioning led to an exploration and reconsideration of what I thought it meant to be an effective teacher and how I saw myself as a teacher. In response to this question I suggested effectiveness was whether or not I am “accomplishing what it is I hope to achieve on that day” (Hostetler, Blog Post, January 31, 2009). This highlights my focus on thinking about who I was as a teacher, what my purpose is for teaching social studies, and whether or not I was aligning purpose and practice in ways congruent with how I saw myself as a social studies teacher. Instances of reframing like this helped me to rethink my experiences in ways that resulted in improved practice and enriched learning in graduate studies. A deeper understanding

of what I meant by ‘effective teaching’ led to increased efficacy and feelings of empowerment to teach in ways I considered ‘good’ for students as democratic citizens.

### ***Circumstance as a Catalyst for Empowerment***

At Liberty High School<sup>1</sup>, I taught American Government, Economics, and A.P. U.S. Government and Politics courses. It was in the Economics course that lasted half of a school year that the incident described in this research took place. For fifteen years, and for six of the years I taught at Liberty, a corporate organization provided the economics curriculum materials (e.g. a textbook, worksheets, community business associate speakers, and a competitive online game). Also, to my knowledge, the relationship between the teachers/administrators at the school and the corporate sponsor had been a good one up to this point. There was a contract renewal each spring where the district curriculum office with the support of the social studies teachers agreed to use the program for the following year.

The problem came in my fifth year when after brief and informal discussions with colleagues about the ineffectiveness of the guest speakers to teach our students, and the curriculum materials being solely supportive of capitalist values and ends. We decided as a result that we might want to keep the materials but supplement with other sources and limit the number of visits from guest speakers to one or two class periods throughout the semester. This decision was made as we discussed the conflict and tension between the source of the curriculum, the content of the curriculum, and the democratic values and purposes we espoused in our classrooms. A curriculum that promotes competition and wholeheartedly endorses free market capitalism over the common good created a tension with the values of social responsibility, collaboration, and concern for the well being of others that guided teaching and learning in this context. The corporate sponsor was under the impression the teachers were obligated to not only use the materials, but to teach with them using the instructional approaches and unit/course organization laid out by the curriculum program they offered. These standards of implementation, should we fail to meet them were considered a breach of contract and would result in a fee of \$1,600 USD charged to the school district if I, as one of these teachers, refused to adhere. To comply I was asked to use all and only their materials in the order and organization in which they were provided, and invite the guest speakers from local business for eight class

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<sup>1</sup> The name of this school has been changed to a pseudonym

sessions with my students in which they would teach the content from how they experienced it in the “real world.” This problem developed out of a series of face-to-face visits and email exchanges between two employees of the organization and myself. As I was engaged in a deep examination of my own practice and the influence of my learning in graduate studies my personal rationale for teaching social studies was changing and in many ways causing a greater tension for me as a curriculum decision maker. One example of this is a *standard of implementation* from the curriculum provider that required local businessmen and businesswomen to come into the classroom and teach a full lesson a specific number of times throughout the semester. I limited the number of times I would have them visit as guest instructors and then did not use the textbook, which I felt espoused and reinforced only capitalist values and notions of sociopolitical-economy. On March 24, 2009 I received an email from our economic curriculum providers. The email indicated that, because I refused to follow the standards of curriculum implementation and use the organization’s materials as directed and the board of directors had voted to charge the district that employed me the \$1,600 USD.

My initial reaction to the email was anger, but I considered my teaching to be informed by beliefs, a sound rationale, and my image of self as a democratic practitioner established through years of education and experience were better than what the curriculum provider wanted. I worked immediately to build a coalition of support through discussions and meetings with administrators and colleagues. Finally, I approached my administrators, who were supportive of me and my position as a professional educator to make choices that I thought were best for my students. The curriculum director was ready to write a check that day, but after one meeting with the teachers, building principal, and the corporate sponsor the fee they charged the district was waived and we were allowed to complete that year how we saw fit. At the end of the school year, we reevaluated our economics program and ordered different curriculum materials and texts giving the teachers more freedom to make curricular decisions in the classroom.

## **Implications**

### ***Implications for Practice***

Within three months of self-study, a sense of empowerment had developed in me as a teacher. A teacher who with six years of experience had never taken such a stand professionally, I found myself willing, and felt justified as a professional educator in refusing to adhere to the

curriculum providers' requirements. I also worked to gain support from administration and colleagues to teach in ways that were, what I believed to be, better for students and in the end strengthened my relationships with the building principal, assistant principals, department chair, and curriculum director. The end result allowed me to approach teaching social studies in ways more in line with my own beliefs and rationale and thus more easily negotiate the tension I experienced when using materials that left out important aspects of social-political economy in teaching for citizenship education. This final aspect of a developing democratic practice is indicative of how through self-study teachers and teacher educators can engage in an exploration of beliefs and learning to develop a rationale for teaching that empowers them to take action and teach in more meaningful and democratic ways.

### ***Implications for Students***

This curriculum influenced students in a variety of ways. Students often expressed discontent with the businessmen and businesswomen who came to speak and by the third or fourth visit wondered, "how many more times will he/she be in to talk to us?" These individuals were there to teach but had never been through a teacher education program and in many cases were not familiar with the content. They often did more to share their experiences and promote their field as a potential career path for students than to facilitate any kind of learning about economics content, let alone citizenship, in a democratic society. Similarly the textbook, worksheets, and other activities did more to promote competition and give students a sense of running a business. Any significant curricular changes will have an effect on students, what they learn and how they might learn it, but limitations on teachers by others who are unfamiliar with and fail to take into consideration the needs and wants of students in unique contexts is a detriment to the learning environment and disservice to our students and communities.

### ***Implications for Social Studies Education***

The implications for social studies education include the potential of self-study to help teacher educators, teachers, or graduate students gain new knowledge, understanding, and insight into their own practice in the ongoing development of a rationale for teaching social studies (Hawley, 2010a; 2010b). Self-study, of this sort, also holds the potential to model a democratic practice for students (see Ritter, 2010). Making the work public also offers a unique contribution

of understanding to the wider community. This research, and similar work adds to the critical, communal, and personal perspectives on democratic practice in the ways it provides insight into how a teacher might challenge the system, build community, and use inquiry to make change in curriculum within set structures of a school system. It also highlights the complexity that exists in uniquely situated and contextual experiences that might help teachers and researchers understand the power of self-study and the ways they might be empowered through inquiry into their own practice. In particular, self-study has the potential to empower teachers to shape or reshape classrooms, schools, policies, and practice in ways that improve teaching and learning for democratic purposes.

Given this argument for the value of self-study and the work presented in this article, I feel: (1) Individual research studies will provide rich context for making sense of tensions in striving for democratic practice in social studies classroom. Because so much of the work in democratic education exists at the theoretical or conceptual level with competing notions of what is democratic, studies such as this one may provide powerful examples of the practical challenges in the lives of educators striving for democratic practice and professionalism; (2) This study offers a unique opportunity for researchers and other interested individuals to identify common challenges in striving for democratic practice and professionalism as teachers or teacher educators and potentially work to better understand the tensions in becoming the educators we might strive to be; and (3) Self-study is, indeed, a methodology well-suited to the philosophy and practice of democratic education. It is my hope that this work can serve as an example of a way to bridge purpose and practice (Hostetler, 2010) through empowerment toward a powerful democratic practice.

It is my hope that this work will contribute to an understanding of the nature of self-study and the powerful potential of self-study as a methodology for research in social education that facilitates democratic practice through empowering teachers. In this article I have provided a connection between social studies purposes, democratic practice, and self-study as practitioner inquiry. This was illustrated through an example of self-study research that included a changing teacher image and building teacher efficacy as key aspects of developing democratic practice. These findings highlight how self-study is uniquely suited to developing a democratic practice and how through collaborative work can reframe experiences in ways that, when combined with



an inquiry stance, can lead to a deeper understanding of individual beliefs and empower teachers in educational contexts to act in democratically oriented ways.

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